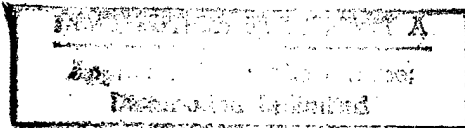


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UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND:
NEW PLAYER IN CENTRAL ASIA'S "GREAT GAME"

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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William R. Kunzweiler

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Abstract of

UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND:
NEW PLAYER IN CENTRAL ASIA'S "GREAT GAME"

USCENTCOM will add the Central Asian nations of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan to its Area of Responsibility (AOR) effective October 1, 1999. The region's huge gas and oil reserves, ethnic and religious volatility, and immature governments (having only been in existence since the Soviet Union's 1991 collapse) mark it as a potential "flashpoint" for conflict as the millenium approaches.

This analysis of geopolitics and demography highlights USCENTCOM's challenges. China, it is argued, represents more of a threat to Central Asian stability than Russia, though several states are competing for influence in a revival of last century's "great game." The U.S. imperative is to ensure that no regional hegemon emerges as Central Asian economies and, presumably, democracies mature. Proposals for USCENTCOM action as prelude to next year's AOR adjustment include:

- 1) Institutionalizing U.S. Atlantic Command's Central Asian Battalion peacekeeping exercise concept;
- 2) Establishing a cross-specialty HQU SCENTCOM Joint Task Force Augmentation Cell (JTFAC) to consolidate and expand expertise on Central Asia, with a focus on rapid crisis response;
- 3) Sponsoring a forum to integrate the JTFAC with governmental and civilian representatives to include energy and technology industries, economic aid institutions, agriculture, environmental protection and restoration, cultural exchange, and law enforcement professionals;
- 4) Appointing USCENTCOM Security Assistance Officers to ambassadorial staffs in each of the Central Asian embassies; and
- 5) Offering expanded International Military Training and Education opportunities to Central Asian defense establishment personnel.

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I. INTRODUCTION

More than six years have passed since Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus signed the treaty to disband the U.S.S.R. and form a new Commonwealth of Independent States. Ironically, the Soviet Union's demise in December 1991 marked the birth of the five new Central Asian nations of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan.*

Central Asia is still warming, in varying degrees, to concepts of democracy, capitalism, and national identities. Many critical uncertainties are unresolved, and without U.S. engagement and assistance, threats to the region's security are likely to intensify.

On February 25, 1998, the Department of Defense announced that Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan will be assigned to United States Central Command's (USCENTCOM) Area of Responsibility (AOR) effective October 1, 1999.¹ This change to the Unified Command Plan (UCP) confirms America's commitment to accept any security challenges in a region of great riches and fledgling governments.

This essay will provide a Central Asian assessment. Intrastate tension, interstate competition, and external peer competitors in the region contribute to a complex web of suspicion, biases, and shifting loyalties. We will outline some of the challenges USCENTCOM may face. We will also propose several steps that USCENTCOM can take now, consistent with its mission to deter aggression and, failing deterrence, defend its AOR.

Our regional assessment will suggest that a weakened Russia, despite threats to eventually reunite her former republics, is unlikely to recover. We propose instead that China stands to gain most from the region's largely untapped energy riches. Reasoned and measurable U.S. actions must be taken to ensure that neither of these competitors, nor any other, threatens hegemony in Central Asia.

A "business as usual" approach by USCENTCOM is likely to push Central Asia to the

*Central Asia regional map is attached as Figure 1.

proverbial "back burner." The region is far too symbolically and geopolitically important to be taken for granted. Actions taken now would capitalize on USCENTCOM strengths as it prepares to assume responsibility in 1999 and would enhance Central Asia's security in the interim. These steps include:

- 1) Institutionalizing U.S. Atlantic Command's Central Asian Battalion peacekeeping exercise concept;
- 2) Establishing a cross-specialty HQUSCENTCOM Joint Task Force Augmentation Cell (JTFAC) to consolidate and expand expertise on Central Asia, with a focus on rapid crisis response;
- 3) Sponsoring a forum to integrate the JTFAC with governmental and civilian representatives to include the energy and technology industries, economic aid institutions, agriculture, environmental protection and restoration, cultural exchange, and law enforcement professionals;
- 4) Appointing USCENTCOM Security Assistance Officers to ambassadorial staffs in each of the Central Asian embassies; and
- 5) Offering expanded International Military Training and Education opportunities to Central Asian defense establishment personnel.

II. THE UCP AND U.S. NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR CENTRAL ASIA

President Truman's 1946 "Outline Command Plan" was the first U.S. planning document to structure command of forces under Joint Chiefs' of Staff control.² Over a dozen revised Unified Command Plans have been adopted, and since 1979 the UCP has been reviewed biannually.³

The UCP assigns general geographic areas of responsibility to the nation's five combatant commands. Geographic responsibilities among the combatant commands are mostly unchanged since the Soviet Union's collapse.** Since 1991, the five "stans," as the Central Asian nations are often called, have been unassigned to any of the combatants. Both USCENTCOM and United States European Command (USEUCOM) consider them as an

**Each of the combatant commands' current and future Areas of Responsibility is depicted at Figure 2.

"Area of Interest," but neither has official responsibility for monitoring the region.

Whether current UCP boundaries are optimally assigned is arguable. Certainly, debating "ownership" among the Commanders-in-Chief (CINCs) for new countries was a rare experience. Different selection criteria for assignment suggest different laydowns. Span of control considerations, for example, may lead to different boundaries from those drawn based on ethnic cohesion. Existing regional threats are another factor, as is current forward presence, coalition or alliance partner support, lines of communication, energy availability, and the status of other natural resources.

Three commands--U.S. Atlantic Command (USACOM), USEUCOM, and USCENTCOM--could make reasonable cases regarding assigning Central Asia to their respective AORs. Even U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM), as we shall see, might argue for assuming responsibility for the region. USCENTCOM, though, was selected. Next year, its span of responsibility will increase from 20 countries to 25. The challenges will be formidable. Forming a strategy must start at the national level.

President Clinton's national strategy for Central Asia proclaims "vital U.S. security interests" in ensuring stable, modern, free-trading democracies,⁴ but it is short on specifics. "Substantial U.S. commercial participation" to move oil and gas resources to international markets is advocated, but "much remains to be done."⁵ The White House acknowledges that "our instruments for advancing these [political and economic reform] goals are our bilateral relationships, our leadership of international institutions, and the billions of dollars in private and multilateral resources that we can help mobilize."⁶

III. BATTLESPACE INFORMATION: A REGIONAL ASSESSMENT

USCENTCOM, then, is not expanding its boundaries to encompass merely a meaningless, barren wasteland. The area must be considered a potential battlespace. We can assign information about this battlespace into four general categories to provide a framework for assessment.⁷ Elements of physical environment, enemy and neutral forces, U.S. and coalition

forces, and the "intangible environment" combine to paint a picture of a diverse, potentially explosive region.

Physical Environment.

Many Central Asian geographic factors are significant. The "stans" cover 1.6 million square miles, which is just under 20% of the former U.S.S.R.'s area, but size is only the first piece of the geostrategic puzzle.

Turkmenistan shares a 1,100 mile unguarded, unfortified border with Iran. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan border the Chinese province of Xinjiang for over 3,000 miles. The dangers of unimpeded migration or possible invasion are real. The region is at the "end of the line" from Russia, making it very susceptible to poorly maintained Russian transportation and infrastructure and endemic Russian graft and corruption.⁸ Routes to an ocean from Central Asia are long and difficult: south through Iran and Pakistan to the Persian Gulf and Sea of Oman (1,400 miles); west through Russia to the Black Sea or through Turkey via Armenia and Azerbaijan (2,000 miles); or east through China to the China Sea (3,000 miles).⁹ Finally, we must acknowledge Central Asia as a potential "back door" for Pakistan or India.

Demographics are part of the physical environment as well. A regional population of some 60 million may not be significant in terms of the region's geography, but demographic diversity and conflicting "pulls" for influence among the population are critical.

Transmigration has been widespread; potential for ethnic conflicts lurks on several fronts.¹⁰ Kazakhs descend from a mix of Turkish tribes and nomadic Mongols.¹¹ Kyrgyz are predominantly from northern Mongolian tribes. Tajiks are of Persian-speaking Iranian heritage. Turkmen are mostly Turkish, while Uzbeks are from a mix of Turkish tribes. Each country lives with the knowledge that fewer than 50% of the titular nationality (and ruling elite) lives inside its borders.¹² High birth rates are another problem. Large Central Asian families have resulted in a poverty-stricken underclass of unemployed or underemployed, poorly-educated, and frustrated workers.¹³

All of these ethnic groups live atop the region's strategic and operational center of gravity: its huge oil and natural gas deposits. Energy is the region's best, and perhaps only, ticket to the world economy.¹⁴ Known gas reserves of Turkmenistan alone are twice those of the North Sea and four times those of the Gulf of Mexico.¹⁵ Kazakhstan claims potentially 50 billion barrels of oil reserves, with Turkmenistan estimating up to 37 billion barrels.¹⁶ The U.S. State Department estimates up to 178 billion barrels among Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and the non-Central Asian Azerbaijan.¹⁷ Cost estimates for laying oil and natural gas pipelines out of the region are astronomical--as high as \$10 billion for an oil line from Kazakhstan to Europe.¹⁸ This potential moves a regional analysis from geopolitics into the more complex realm of high-stake geoeconomics, where, as Edward Luttwak points out, a zero-sum game is not a necessity.¹⁹

Enemy and Neutral Forces: Peer Competitors in the Central Asian "Great Game."

USCENTCOM has doubtless already assessed the size and capabilities of theater forces. Assessing intentions is another matter. Rudyard Kipling popularized the term "great game" in his novel *Kim* to describe the 18th and early 19th century rivalry between Great Britain and Russia for influence and riches in the Indian subcontinent--the land between Russia and India.²⁰ USCENTCOM must gain an appreciation for which countries vie today for a stake in a new Central Asian "great game."

The first key player is **Russia**. Despite the throes of getting their own economy jump-started, the Russians are not about to give up their claims of control over the new states. Russia defines the region as the "near abroad,"²¹ and makes no apologies for its goal of reuniting the republics. Russian citizens abound--45% of the population in Kazakhstan, 22% in Kyrgyzstan, 13% in Turkmenistan, 11% in Uzbekistan, and 10% in Tajikistan.²² Many analysts surmise that the Commonwealth of Independent States, which is led by Russia and includes the Central Asian states, is of limited credibility and is merely an interlude to a return to a Russian empire.²³ This spirit of irredentism has driven Russia to playing hardball, as it

continues to push bilateral defense treaties with each of the new states²⁴ and extend pressure even to the extent of virtual extortion.²⁵ Because they depend on Russian pipelines for the flow of oil and gas, the new countries are helpless when lines are blocked and Russia demands ever-increasing shares of profits from new projects.²⁶ Russian troops stationed in Tajikistan have no "exit strategy"; indeed, a realist would note the convenience of civil war to justify Russian presence. Still, all the Central Asian states except Turkmenistan signed the 1992 Collective Security Treaty, in which aggression against any member is to be regarded as aggression against all.²⁷ Russia sees any country that was once part of the Soviet Union as falling within the sphere of its security interests.²⁸ Moscow is weak, frustrated, and desperate over her eroding imperial position, but ultimately sees her real border as that of Central Asia with China, Iran, and Afghanistan.²⁹

Many experts predicted the new states would soon be swept up by Iran or other Islamic fundamentalists, but they misread the complexities and have thus far missed the mark.³⁰ Iran has been cautious. It has reached out financially, and is pushing pipelines, transportation routes, railways, and air travel expansion, but is not aggressively promoting fundamentalist Islam.³¹ Proselytizing might be fruitless anyway. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have a rich Islamic tradition, but Kazakhstan is more diverse and ethnic Kazaks across the region have weaker Islamic roots.³² Iran is isolated and has internal economic and cultural problems. Economic breakdown, a plummeting standard of living, and popular discontent have led to talk of "meltdown" and the regime "imploding."³³ Relations with the U.S. appear to be warming, notwithstanding Iranian protests over recent exercises in the Persian Gulf and U.S. protests over the December 1997 opening of the first natural gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Iran. Iranian President Khatami's suggestion of a possible U.S.-Iran rapprochement has left the door open for a U.S. response.

Turkey has the advantage of a common language with many Central Asian peoples, although regional dialects that have sprung up over the last century have weakened that bond.³⁴ The Sunni sect of Islam shared with Turkey is innately more attractive to the new

countries than the Shi'ite because of its secularism and modern, progressive feel.³⁵ The Turks have invested billions of dollars in Central Asia, mainly in culture, education, telecommunications, and transportation, and are competing strongly with Russia and Iran for oil, but they are still seen as "big brother," and relations with the new countries are tense.³⁶ Many in Central Asia still feel that Turkey abandoned them in the 1920s and 1930s.³⁷ The Turks, of course, have struggles of their own with the Kurds and the Greeks, but Former Secretary of State James Baker was still wise to suggest in 1992 that Turkey is the best choice to take on the role of the West's sentinel in the region.³⁸

Because of their rivalry, **Pakistan** and **India** are both courting Central Asia for long-term allies and economic partners. Their bitter relationship is notorious, and the destabilizing effects of India's nuclear tests add a huge wild card to our analysis. The fact that Pakistan lies in USCENTCOM's AOR while India falls to USPACOM creates a challenge for both CINCs. **Japan** is an enthusiastic supporter of Central Asia's economic growth and independence, given cool Japanese relations with both Russia and China. Japan sponsored Central Asian membership in the Asian Development Bank and is exploring bilateral oil and pipeline deals and other economic assistance programs.³⁹ **Saudi Arabia**, with its petroleum experience and considerable financial resources, could be influential.⁴⁰ Even **Israel** has been cited as having an interest in the area to divert Iran and other pro-Iranian and Muslim influences.⁴¹ Israel is one of few regional states who could offer extensive technological expertise to the region.⁴²

China is the "waking dragon" in the region. When we promote "support for the independence, sovereignty, and security of each of the Central Asian States," we should do so with a Chinese threat in mind as much as one from Russia. Curiously, some "great game" proponents mention China briefly and last, if they mention her at all. She is wrestling with internal political problems, and has been busy with Hong Kong and Taiwan, but has momentum of growing economic and military power working in her favor. Xinjiang province, in the far west, has long been a nuisance to Beijing. It's not far-fetched to extend the definition of Central Asia to include Xinjiang. Seven million Kazakhs, Uzbeks, and Uighurs

(another Turkic clan) live there.⁴³ The same Islamic sentiment taking root in the border countries exists in Xinjiang, where it equates to the type of unrest that has led to armed uprising. China must push economic development in the west to bring Xinjiang back into the fold. The region, home to China's principal nuclear test and missile launch sites,⁴⁴ is too strategically important to allow to spin out of control. Add China's huge and ever-growing energy demands--one estimate says she'll be importing three million barrels of crude oil a day by 2010.⁴⁵ That figure is nearly half of Saudi Arabia's current production and would be almost 20% of Asia's oil imports.⁴⁶ In 1995, Chinese per capita energy consumption was only 40% of the world average, but three factors will change that figure: a boom in demand for automobiles for the middle class, expanding general and energy-intensive industrial production, and expanding air travel.⁴⁷

Central Asian reserves just over the border and a strategy of increased economic and political ties have tremendous appeal to China. Indications are that Chinese trade with Kazakhstan alone exceeds Turkey's with all five nations.⁴⁸ China reached agreement with Turkmenistan in 1994 to study feasibility of a new railroad and a \$20 billion pipeline to carry oil to the east.⁴⁹ The Tarim Basin inside China and the contentious Spratly Islands in the South China Sea have huge energy reserves, but Tarim oil is located in deep, small, hard-to-find pockets.⁵⁰ The lure of Central Asia's easily accessible riches is tantalizing, as is the attraction of establishing a new "Silk Road" through Central Asia to move Chinese goods westward.

China, indeed, is the biggest potential long-term threat to stability. Bernstein and Munro, in *The Coming Conflict with China*, offer strong evidence that American power represents a threat not just to China's security but to China's plans to play a paramount role in Asian affairs.⁵¹ They cite the now infamous "leaked" internal, for-senior-officials-only document *Can the Chinese Army Win the Next War?* and its clear acknowledgment of a new, bitter U.S.-China rivalry.⁵² One of the book's main themes is that China believes it only has a short time to establish domination over Asia before it is blocked by the U.S. or regional coalitions

that will form to respond to the Chinese challenge.⁵³ USCENTCOM strategy regarding Central Asia cannot discount this assertion, reliable or not. America's Gulf War prowess was a major wake-up call to Chinese military expansion and modernization, and Chinese newspaper warnings that we are "plotting to destroy China as a fortress of socialism and subjugate China in an inferior position"⁵⁴ must be considered. Colin Gray summarizes: "Because of size, character of territory, population, social habits, and location, it would be difficult to exaggerate the potential positive or negative contribution of China to international order."⁵⁵

Chinese *realpolitik* regarding Central Asia and her accelerating economic and military momentum will likely outweigh the impact of sputtering Russian nationalism. Beijing can't afford to be seen as weak. Party survival depends keeping the rebellious west under control; failure to do so would reverberate throughout Taiwan, Tibet, and Inner Mongolia.⁵⁶ Premier Li Peng has vowed that China will "unswervingly safeguard the unity of the motherland and ethnic unity, and resolutely oppose any words or activities designed to split the country or damage ethnic unity."⁵⁷ Last September's signing of a \$9.5 billion dollar contract between Kazakhstan and China National Petroleum Company to build a 2,000 mile oil pipeline from fields in western Kazakhstan to China may be the first of many ambitious agreements linking China to Central Asia. Cost may be only a secondary issue.

Coalitions in Central Asia: Situationally Dependent.

Our discussion of potential competitors is laden with "if's" and "but's." Any combination of the above-mentioned states could equally likely become coalition partners with USCENTCOM in a regional contingency. Just as it is premature to define enemies in Central Asia, it's too early to commit to potential friends. It is certain, though, that military contributions from the "stans" themselves will be minimal. The state of their armed forces can best be described as embryonic, having inherited what they have from Russia.⁵⁸ Much has deteriorated or been decommissioned.

Intangibles and "Unknowns"

Instability defines Central Asia. Civil war has dragged on in Tajikistan since 1992. Conflicts rage on many levels: Islamic fundamentalism versus secularism, fundamentalists versus moderates, anti-Russians versus pro-Russians. Roughly 25,000 Russian troops (9,000 "peacekeepers" and 16,000 border guards)⁵⁹ are in-country. Uzbekistan and Afghanistan are involved. Pakistan, Iran, and others could be drawn in. What sort of country will emerge from last June's uncertain cease fire truce? Can Tajikistan ever catch up with the other countries? Could the others withstand Tajikistan's collapse? How quickly might "dominoes" fall?

Likewise, the outcome of Afghanistan's civil war could spill over into Central Asia if the Islamic Taliban militia continues its push from Kabul to the north. The entire region could be torn apart if it can not deal with ethnic uprisings. Nearly twice as many Tajiks live in Afghanistan as in Tajikistan.⁶⁰ Around 40,000 Russian troops remain in Central Asia. Lacking viable national militaries of their own, the Central Asian states must tolerate the presence of the region's only effective border security force.⁶¹

IV. USCENTCOM's SUBREGIONALIZED AOR

In the 1990's, USCENTCOM has been of necessity a Persian Gulf-centered command. Every crisis has been a possible prelude to full-fledged war. Twelve war plans on the shelf reflect life at the tip of the spear. Regrettably, a "crisis reaction" lifestyle doesn't lend itself to effective long-range planning. USCENTCOM's Commander in Chief, General Anthony C. Zinni, USMC, has directed a subregional approach, presumably to better define and analyze his environment, describe a desired endstate, and target actions to reach that endstate. Four subregions comprise his AOR:

SUBREGION	COUNTRIES
Arabian Peninsula	Kuwait/Bahrain/Qatar/UAE/Saudi Arabia/Oman/Yemen
Western States	Egypt/Jordan
Horn of Africa	Eritrea/Djibouti/Ethiopia/Kenya/Seychelles/Sudan/Somalia
Central and Southern Asia	Pakistan/Iran/Iraq/Afghanistan/+ 5 Central Asian states

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Dividing the AOR into four subregions is strong impetus for "thinking outside" the Gulf War-centered "box." Stove-piped subregional planning within each headquarters directorate would essentially represent "business as usual." An integrated effort throughout USCENTCOM headquarters will be required to capitalize on General Zinni's vision. The UCP change is an ideal opportunity to move to a team-centered planning approach. This innovation could be the first of several to pave the way for next year's AOR expansion.

V. WHAT USCENTCOM CAN DO NOW

The Institute for National Strategic Studies' *Strategic Assessment 1997* proposes that China and Russia share a common goal in Central Asia of maintaining the status quo.⁶³ We disagree. The "great game" competition for riches and influence is alive and well. Recognizing Chinese and Russian interests and potential in Central Asia is prudent; challenging them would be ill-advised. How, then, should USCENTCOM engage?

We have already reviewed President Clinton's strategy of general support for the region. Zbigniew Brzezinski, writing in *Foreign Affairs* in 1994, was more specific. Brzezinski urged providing expertise on American-style democracy and the free market, encouraging cooperation among the countries, setting up political consultations with China, and generally isolating Russia "with a friendly sentiment."⁶⁴ Last fall, Brzezinski pointed out that the U.S. is indeed the "indispensable nation," unmatched in terms of four key dimensions of power--military, economic, technological, and cultural.⁶⁵ USCENTCOM can contribute across the spectrum. The following actions, as a minimum, should be taken:

1) Institutionalize the Central Asian Battalion (Centrazbat) peacekeeping exercise concept. On September 15, 1997, the U.S. spent an estimated \$5 million to deploy a 500-person troop force over 7,700 miles from Fort Bragg to an isolated plateau in Kazakhstan.

These troops joined with about 900 others from Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan in exercise Centrazbat 97--the first military exercise ever with Russia and the former Soviet republics. General John J. Sheehan, USMC, Commander of USACOM, was first to parachute in and asserted "that there is no nation on the face of the earth that we cannot get to."⁶⁶ Demonstrations like this of U.S. capability to provide short-notice presence in the region are invaluable tools for stabilization. They send a clear message to China, Russia, Iran, or any other potential aggressor that we are able to protect the fledgling nations in spite of their isolation and land-locked status.

All Central Asian states except Tajikistan are members of the United Nations' Partnership for Peace (PFP) program. A U.S. initiative, PFP was launched at the January 1994 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) summit to establish strong links between NATO, its new democratic partners in the former Soviet bloc, and some of Europe's traditionally neutral countries to enhance European security.⁶⁷ Although Centrazbat 97 was not an official PFP exercise, it was held "in the same spirit."⁶⁸ Russia, as a PFP member herself, is thus virtually forced into a "grin and bear it" position of equality in PFP undertakings.

Planning for Centrazbat 98 is ongoing. USACOM accomplished much and learned many lessons last fall. USCENTCOM must join this year's effort with an eye toward assuming lead command responsibility next year. Rallying more Centrazbat participation from Russia and each of the "stans" in power projection exercises is the best "hands off" message USCENTCOM can send to any would-be aggressor.

A critical military uncertainty must be mentioned. Although we properly commended Kazakhstan for voluntary dismantling her strategic nuclear weapons in April 1995, enriched uranium continues to be produced in all the states except Turkmenistan.⁶⁹ The temptation to sell uranium, perhaps to non-nuclear states or groups, is real. International pressure and monitoring must be maintained to avert catastrophic results.

2) Establish a Joint Task Force Augmentation Cell (JTFAC) at USCENTCOM headquarters to consolidate and expand military expertise regarding Central Asia.

USPACOM adopted this concept to enable more effective crisis response.⁷⁰ Central Asia merits the same focus. In USPACOM, the JTFAC is a 25-35 person tailored team drawing expertise from various staff specialties. Its members perform normal staff duties in addition to pooling operational -level crisis action response skills. The CINC's personnel can thus change hats from headquarters staffers to JTF staffers as required. Founding a Central Asian "corporate memory" in USCENTCOM via such an Augmentation Cell would provide a nucleus for future in-house training and exercises. USPACOM has pointed out that in a crisis, where staffs must start out at a dead run, personal relationships and mutual understanding pay huge dividends.⁷¹

3) Sponsor a forum to integrate the JTFAC with governmental and civilian representatives to include energy and technology industries, economic aid institutions, agriculture, environmental protection and restoration, cultural exchange, and law enforcement professionals. General Charles Krulak, Marine Corps Commandant, suggested in a speech last fall that such experts be brought directly into military strategy planning and execution processes.⁷² Krulak's vision goes "beyond interagency, beyond jointness."⁷³ USCENTCOM should be first to implement this vision as the Command addresses the challenges of a Central Asian AOR. The CINC's Political Advisor would play a key role in successfully integrating non-military and non-governmental expertise into what Krulak calls a "virtual staff."⁷⁴ Several theater-specific factors suggest that the concept is tailor-made for Central Asia.

Energy expertise is crucial. U.S. Ambassador to Kazakhstan A. Elizabeth Jones stated shortly after Centrazbat 97 that Central Asian energy reserves will be "a backup or fill-in" to the Middle East, should flow be interrupted.⁷⁵ About half our oil supplies are imported now, and all forecasts predict growth in both volume and share over the next 10-15 years.⁷⁶ Interests of companies like Chevron are clearly of interest to USCENTCOM; the more dialogue the CINC can establish with them, the better prepared he will be to offer them *de facto* protection.

Financial aid coordination has been lacking. Central Asia is receiving various forms and amounts of aid from the West as its economies restructure. Well-intentioned assistance, however, seems to be pouring in indiscriminately and may not be as beneficial as assumed.⁷⁷ We rarely consider our knowledge of the region's history, cultural background, or current social climate. Parties often talk past each other, and the result is frustration and disappointment.⁷⁸ Coordination between donor agencies is also poor. Too many easy loans may be hurting Central Asia as much as helping, as its economies are sinking deeper into debt. The U.S. should take a more proactive role in coordinating timing, scope, and targets of economic aid packages to Central Asia. USCENTCOM could be the conduit for this coordination.

Soviet chemical, biological, and nuclear testing during the Cold War has left the region with disproportionately high cancer rates.⁷⁹ Cotton has been essentially the only crop for years. The environment in general is abysmal: the land is exhausted and industrial pollution, over-fertilization, and a water supply reduced to a trickle has left the region virtually crippled.⁸⁰ The Aral Sea is a dead sea. Water, and access to it, may be as likely a "flashpoint issue" in Central Asia as energy. More experts in the fields of environmental protection and recovery should be integrated into a USCENTCOM-led effort to educate the countries and coordinate clean-up activities.

Free elections, as always, must be supported. Unfettered political expression and free enterprise are new concepts in Central Asia; we can support them. Thousands of Central Asian citizens have participated in U.S. exchange programs--educators, parliamentarians, lawyers and judges, journalists, and other future leaders.⁸¹ Legal and technical assistance in such fields as drug enforcement, organized crimefighting, and weapons antiproliferation must be made available.⁸²

4) Appoint Security Assistance Officers to ambassadorial staffs in each of the Central Asian embassies. By next October, these officers, working for CINCUSCENTCOM, could be well integrated into U.S. Country Teams throughout the

region. Assignments should be made as soon as possible. Prepositioning staff now may prove to be invaluable later.

5) Expand International Military Training and Education opportunities to potential Central Asian counterparts. Next month, USACOM will sponsor a pilot/navigator exchange with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Programs like these are ideal for attacking commonality and peculiarity challenges in USCENTCOM-Central Asian relations. Communication is key, and it must be prioritized. Training exchanges and professional military education opportunities will inarguably build mutual confidence. USCENTCOM should also analyze the possibility of establishing Central Asian liaison billets in headquarters staff.

The imperative of U.S. engagement⁸³ is that we must have the capabilities and will to continue to exert global leadership and remain the world's preferred security partner. But engagement is not without risk. Though America can lend much assistance, Bosnia has taught us to be wary of overconfidence or a "missionary complex" in trying to shape events and provide security in an isolated, turbulent region.

The United States and USCENTCOM must commit themselves to ensuring that neither China nor Russia nor any other regional power succeeds in imposing hegemony in Central Asia. The "great game" goes on, and we can not wish it away. USCENTCOM should embrace participation even though an American military victory is not the objective. Central Command is at the threshold of a great opportunity. The steps we have suggested are only the first in what promises to be an long-lasting, universally rewarding journey.

The Caucasus and Central Asia



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FIGURE 1.

(courtesy CIA World Fact Book 95)

COMMANDERS' AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY

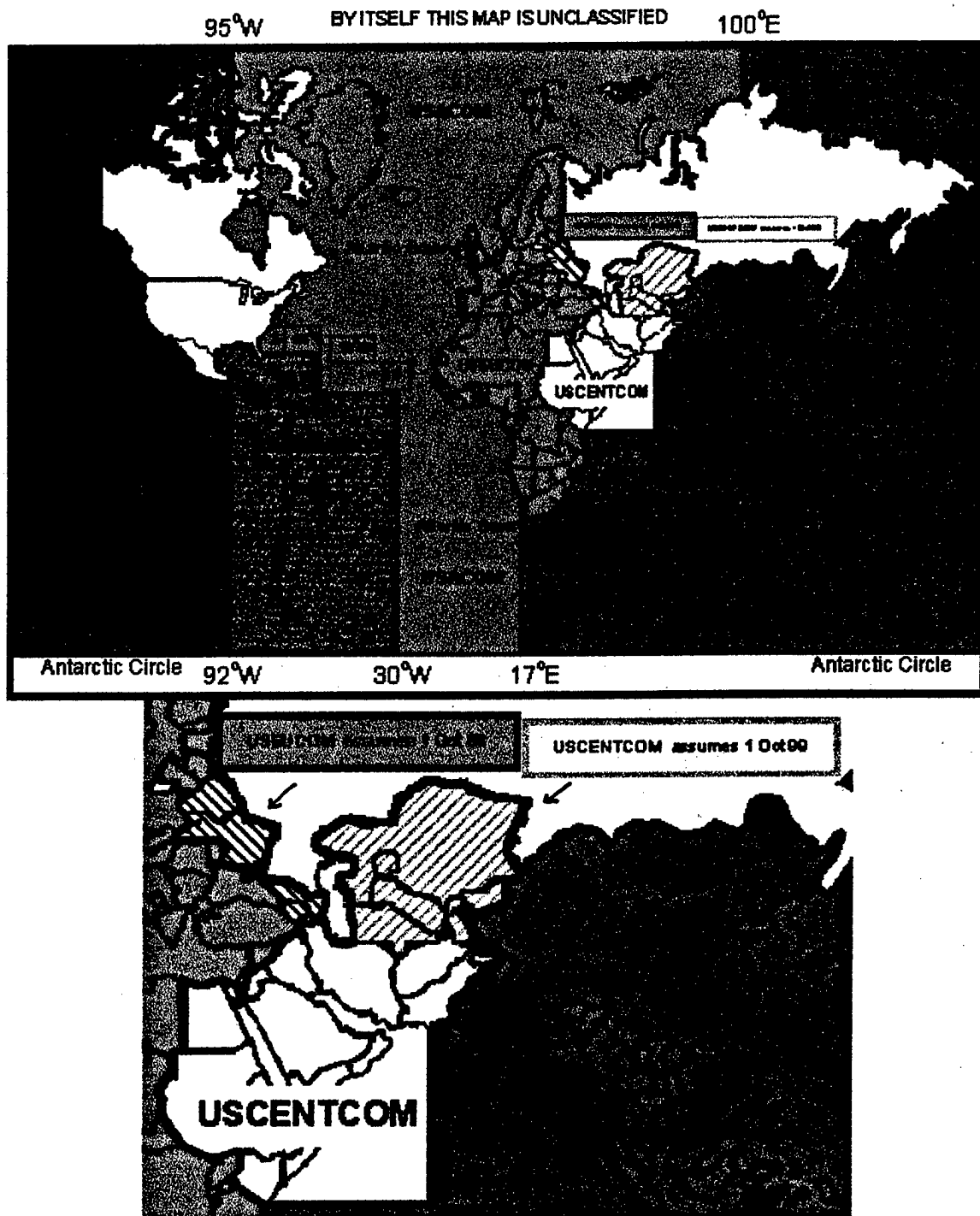


FIGURE 2.

(from Ass't SecDef (PA) News Release, February 25, 1998)

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⁸Jed C. Snyder, ed., *After Empire: The Emerging Geopolitics of Central Asia* (Washington: National Defense University Press, 1995), 221.

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¹⁰Lieutenant Colonel Dianne L. Smith, *Central Asia: A New Great Game?* (Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 1996), 3.

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¹⁷Frank C. Alexander, Jr., "Caspian Reserves Luring Operators," *Oil & Gas Journal*, July 21, 1997, 23.

¹⁸Oksana Reznikova, "Transnational Corporations," in *Central Asia in Transition: Dilemmas of Political and Economic Development*, ed. Boris Rumor (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1996), 85.

¹⁹Edward N. Luttwak, "From Geo-Politics to Geo-Economics," *The National Interest*, Summer 1990, 23.

²⁰M.E. Ahrari, *The New Great Game in Muslim Central Asia* (Washington: Institute for National Strategic Studies, 1996), 2.

²¹Martha Brill Olcott, "Sovereignty and the 'Near Abroad,'" *Orbis*, Volume 39, No. 3, Summer 1995, 359.

²²Snyder, xviii.

²³Paul Kubicek, "Regionalism, Nationalism, and Realpolitik in Central Asia," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Volume 49, No. 4, 1997, 637.

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²⁵Steve LeVine, "Moscow Pressures Its Neighbors to Share Their Oil, Gas Revenues," *The Washington Post*, March 18, 1994, A-24.

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²⁸Richard Pipes, "Is Russia Still an Enemy?" *Foreign Affairs*, Volume 76, No. 3, September-October 1997, 73.

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³¹*Ibid.*, 20.

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³³Starr, 28.

³⁴Snyder, xxiv.

³⁵Blank, 17.

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⁴⁰Shirin Akiner, "Political Threats to Stability and Social Cohesion in Central Asia," in *Economic Developments and Reforms in Cooperation Partner Countries: The Social and Human Dimensioned* ed. Weichhardt, Reiner (Brussels: NATO Office of Information and Press, 1997), 27.
Akiner, 27.

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⁵⁰Calder, 57.

⁵¹Richard Bernstein and Ross H. Munro, *The Coming Conflict With China* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 28.

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⁵⁵Colin Gray, quoted in Bernstein and Munro's *The Coming Conflict with China*, 58.

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⁷²John Donnelly, "Top Marine: Bring Bankers and Greenpeace On As Planners," *Defense Week*, November 24, 1997, 9.

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